

Dear Honorable Members of the Environment Committee,

I care about animals and I vote. Please accept my testimony to:

1. SUPPORT with AMENDMENT HB 5293, An Act Prohibiting the Use of Wild or Exotic Animals in Traveling Animal Acts. HB 5293 is a commonsense proposal that will promote animal welfare and protect public safety by prohibiting use of certain animals who are commonly used in circus traveling shows (e.g., camels, bears, elephants, lions, tigers), while providing exemptions for legitimate educational activities.

I have been an advocate for animal welfare for many years, and am currently a Humane Policy Volunteer Leader for the Humane Society of the United States. I have previously worked as a professional writer and researcher regarding animal welfare issues. And I am a long-time supporter of organizations who free exotic animals from confinement in circuses and traveling shows. Through these roles, I have learned about the physical and psychological traumas experienced by animals in the circus industry, and their suffering is truly heartbreaking.

Wild and exotic animals do not naturally follow the commands of humans, nor can their needs be met in circuses or traveling shows; therefore, the harshest cruelties imaginable are utilized to make them submissive. For example, in order to make an elephant obedient to human captors, a wild calf undergoes a process called “phajaan,” or breaking of the spirit. The calf is denied food and water and is beaten until he or she follows human commands. Once in captivity, it is common for elephants to experience ailments such as chronic foot infections, blindness, loneliness and boredom, malnourishment, and posttraumatic stress disorder. This information is readily available from Wildlife SOS, an internationally recognized nonprofit organization that rescues captive elephants, including elephants from the circus industry.

The Animal Welfare Act fails to protect circus animals from abuse and neglect – strengthening the need for a prohibition on circuses and traveling shows to prevent cruelty. The Commerford Zoo, whose elephants have performed right here in Connecticut and who regularly perform at the Big E, has been cited by the USDA more than 50 times for failing to meet the very basic requirements of the Animal Welfare Act. One of their elephants, Beulah, suffered chronically from a foot disorder, and collapsed and died at the Big E due to blood poisoning from a uterine infection. According to the Non-Human Rights Project, citations from the USDA have sadly not resulted in notable changes for Commerford’s elephants. Additional information regarding the Commerford Zoo and its failure to care for its animals is available through the Non-Human Rights Project.

Circuses and traveling shows provide no educational benefit nor genuine connection to animals, as the performing animals are forced into human interaction and denied the ability to display natural behaviors. The only value that is taught through circuses and traveling shows is exploitation.

In the wild, exotic animals have lives of their own, families, and essential roles to ecosystems that humans have no right to disturb. Elephants, for example, live in close matriarchal societies. They show care for one another, as well as joy and grief, and even visit the bones of their

deceased relatives for years. They create watering holes and pathways for other animals, and help to spread plant seeds (making them a keystone species). It is these types of natural behaviors that make elephants and other exotic animals so fascinating. And learning about the roles of exotic animals in their natural environments is what will generate true interest, connection to nature, compassion, and conservation efforts.

Please pass this important law and please amend line 33 by removing “includes any animal that is not domesticated” because, in other states, some exhibitors have been trying use this exact same phrase to create a loophole that circumvents legislative intent.

2. OPPOSE SB 244, An Act Concerning Wildlife that Causes Damage to Livestock, Poultry, or Bees. SB 244 is a sneaky, backdoor way to allow unregulated hunting of all wildlife, including bears and bobcats. The bill would add extreme vagueness and loopholes into statute, inviting corruption. Such shenanigans are at play because trophy hunting proponents, led by DEEP, know that this bill is hugely unpopular with the general public. (A recent, large study found DEEP’s culture to be misaligned with the values of the CT public (<https://sites.warnercnr.colostate.edu/wildlifevalues/>.) As a practical matter, SB 244 would encourage cycles of killing rather than the humane, long-term solutions desired by most Connecticut residents.

Science shows that wildlife conflicts are best managed through public education on how to remove food attractants, protective measures (e.g., fencing, electric fencing around beehives, properly secured chicken coops, the use of birthing pastures), and aversive conditioning.

Proponents are arguing that this bill is for farmers, but farmers can already manage "problem" bears. Although hunting of Connecticut bears is currently illegal, DEEP has long relied on a seemingly unrelated trapping statute in order to allow farmers to kill bears doing damage to property (CGS 26-72), as evidenced by a 2009 OLR report ([2009-R-0313](#)) and again in a 2018 OLR report ([2018-R-0265](#)). SB 244 exacerbates the problems caused by DEEP's overly broad interpretation of laws that benefit trophy hunters and actively discourage humane responses.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Julie Stankiewicz
Manchester, CT